

ENS Matthew Biven
JRCOSTEP Summer 2019
Eastern Kentucky University
Bemidji Area Office
Bemidji, Minnesota

My name is Matthew Biven and I am currently a student at Eastern Kentucky University (EKU). I plan on graduating in December 2020 with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Environmental Health Science. One of the major requirements of ECU's environmental health science program is that students complete a field relevant internship. After hearing LCDR Matthew Ellis speak at ECU I knew I wanted to pursue the JRCOSTEP externship. With the help of one of my professors I started the long and thorough application process. It can be a little intimidating when you see the long list of things that they require and it does take a bit of time and effort. I am so grateful that I pushed myself to go through the process because my experience was priceless.



Working as a JRCOSTEP with the Indian Health Service, Bemidji Area Office was a very rewarding experience. I learned so much about a variety of different environmental health and safety subjects. I have learned a lot of new information and I have been able to apply information that I have already learned to real world experiences. I have also learned a lot about the different Native American tribes and their relationships with the Indian Health Service (IHS).

Throughout my time with the IHS, I have developed as a professional and as a person. I have been able to work alongside great U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps Officers in Bemidji, MN and I was able to experience the cultures of local Native American tribes. I did most of my work with LT Shelby Foerg and, my preceptor, LCDR Timothy Taylor. With LT Shelby Foerg I worked on food safety surveys and vector surveillance and with LCDR Timothy Taylor I worked on food safety surveys and radiation safety surveys. I am very thankful that I was able to work with such great people that took the time to teach me while going through the different parts of the job. I can honestly say that I developed more as an environmental health professional than I ever thought could be possible in such a short amount of time.

My two favorite things I did this summer were the vector surveillance projects and the waste audit of a tribal casino. LT Shelby Foerg and I participated in a waste audit where we sorted through the garbage of one of the local casinos and separated the trash into paper, plastic, metal, compostable, food, and refuse. The goal of the project was to show the casino how much they could be recycling and composting to be more environmentally friendly. There were about eight of us that were sorting through the garbage and we were all suited up in Tyvek suits with gloves, boots, and tongs. Although the smell was really bad at times, it was a really fun and neat experience that I was lucky enough to participate in. The vector surveillance projects consisted of two tick drags and mosquito collection with a light trap. The tick drags were really fun because we got to suit up in Tyvek suits and trek through tall grass and weeds looking for ticks.

The mosquito collection was very interesting but identifying the species was very challenging. The mosquitoes I identified and tested, were negative for diseases. I had many more fun and rewarding experiences with the Indian Health Service, but these were just my favorites.

The JRCOSTEP externship is exactly what I was looking for. It is the perfect mix of learning, work, professionalism, and fun. I whole heartedly recommend this internship to any environmental health student. It is a truly amazing experience. I can confidently say that I want to pursue a career with the U.S. Public Health Service upon graduation. I hope I will be selected as a COSTEP again next year and I cannot wait to use the knowledge I have learned in my future career.